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Interview with Ted Lorenzen
by Marsha Trent of the Sonoma West Times & News
with Evelyn S. McClure for the WSCHS

Ted begins to talk about his family coming from the Isle of Fohr (located off Denmark but a German possession)

Ted: For this area, usually ...Cotati, Rohnert Park and Petaluma, the magic password on the island was Petaluma because right after World War I a lot of people had relatives in America ....like my father had an uncle that came back right after World War I about 1918 and he took my father and talked him into coming to America, told him how great a country it was so he sponsored him and by doing that he came to America.

EM: Was the uncle already over here, already living here?

Ted: He had been over here and before World War I had been there and stayed over til the war was over then came and brought my father and his family to America.

MT: What year did your father come to America?

Ted: He came here about 1918 or a little later. We survived over there, my mother, older brother, older sister was the oldest. We stayed there while my father. My father went to Nebraska and worked on big ranches there and sent all his money home. When we had enough, I don't know whether we got something out of the house or that way, I don't know, but we had enough money so we could come to America. We went from the Island to Hamburg, there, I was about 5 then. Then we got aboard ship, had a 2 day layover in Hamburg, went to the ship and went to a seaport, a British seaport it must have been on the Channel somewhere and got on board, more people came on board and from there we came to New York. Stopped in ..while we were in the process of coming over my father moved. He got contact with somebody in Petaluma and he said come out here the weather is great, the people are good and there's lots of work. At that time Petaluma was recognized as the biggest chicken industry in the world. He came out to Petaluma while we were on board ship at sea. We lost contact for 3 or 4 weeks I guess. We got on Ellis island. We were there almost 2 weeks. Because my father had made a move he couldn't be contacted or we couldn't contact him. I don't know how long they would have kept us but my mother finally said when we went into the big hall every day we would go on an sit down and they called names and that person would go in and get interrogated. She had tried every day and seeing people going through and go out ..they got their papers. She finally said to Carolina and John the oldest of the three, ok when they open the door, go in, run in, they had interpreters there, the person said well who do you belong to, what are you doing here? The German interpreter came and they told him they were waiting, waiting and their mother was outside so then Inge Lorenzen to come in and we

got through. The next day we got taken to the train depot and headed to California.

EM: What were your parent's first names?

Ted: Inge and Hermann. Then the train ride was something. Its a wonder we got to California. The tickets and everything were all made up. We got on the train and for the first couple days all we ate was oranges and apples from the vendors who would come through. We'd buy an apple or orange. Finally somebody came aboard, a gentleman, a nice person and he was German, knew German, he said: he saw our predicament, and stayed with us, we ended up at Denver. Up to that point he was our savior. We didn't know we had to transfer to another train and we couldn't figure out why everyone was grabbing their bags and taking off and so this man said, hurry, hurry, hurry, they're going to hold the train if we can make it. We grabbed everything and took off. We just got on the train, they were pretty good at waiting. We found at Hamburg, the trains are on schedule. My nephew told me when he was over in Germany in the Army. He said you got to be on time because of their schedule, no matter, they'd shut the door on you. We got to Denver and from there we got into Oakland. We had, I'm not sure whether it was an Arfsten or somebody from Petaluma came down and brought us up. We might have gone by bus, this person who came, an Arfsten, they lived out by Norman Lane, that part of the country and were in the chicken business. We stayed. My dad worked on ranches. Finally as we grew up two new additions, two brothers and we got into town, the chicken business slowed down. We worked for the Poultry Producers in Petaluma and that was right after the bad days, 1929, 30s. We were going to school. I went into the CCC, the Civilian Conservation Corps. Went up into Lake County and worked there for about a year and a half, in several different areas. Things were tough. Our pay was $21 a month. We learned alot about woodcraft, out in the woods we had a great forester, he was in charge of all the work we did out in the woods and the Army and the Army barracks. You were under their supervision. From there I dropped out of school, I didn't finish high school.

MT: Were you going to high school in Petaluma?

Ted: Yes

MT: How old were you when you went into the Civilian Conservation Corps?

Ted: I was about 16-17.

MT: Was that summertime work or year around?

Ted: We stayed in the barracks. You had corporal, sergeants, medic was military. The officers were 2nd Lieutenants, their first job operating with men. In the morning we'd pile on the trucks and go out in the woods and do our work. We built fire breaks, telephone lines up the high peaks where they could see fires and smoke and call down.

MT: Like observation towers?

Ted: Yes. All that work, then it was getting close to 1937-38, everybody was waiting something to happen and we did finally get into the war.
I was enlisted, got my little notice and I went overseas, to Australia was there 32 months. In the infantry. Then I got rotated back.I got looking for jobs, found a job in Sebastopol in the apples. Worked helping with apples during the season. Then I got acquainted with one of the apple packers and we met at Midway, used to be a little dance place halfway between Santa Rosa and Sebastopol and they had dances. I know the night was very important in my life, my wife's life. Some of the girls said hey call that guy over here, so I came and we got talking and we got in there dancing and from on we went from one thing to another.

EM: So this is where you met your wife?

Ted: It wasn't too long, actually a year and a half before we got married from the time we went together. We should have known whether we were going to like each other or not. But anyway, I got a job when they had the Kist Bottling Co., opened up in Sebastopol. I got the job as driver and right after the war had ended and sugar was short, It was easy to go in with a load of soft drinks and say I've got so many cases and had all the flavors. I can tell you that Edith had a ready made family, had 3 kids, 3 boys and Danny the youngest one was 18 months when this happened. So everything went along.

MT: Where was the bottling company?

Ted: Up on top of Healdsburg Ave., looks like a little warehouse, that was the bottling works.

EM: Where would it be relating to the (Methodist) church.

Ted: There is one building there below the church. (Lutheran?)

Jan: Up on Healdsburg before you make the turn by the Karate place.

Ted: They moved the church up there and down this way.

MT: And it was called "Kist Bottling" K I S T?

Ted: Yes. Because they'd had a little symbol, it said "get kissed (KIST) for a nickel." I used to get a lot of ribbing on that. Especially if you had a lady customer. Oh sure I'd like to get kissed.

MT: That could get you into trouble

Ted: Oh, I never got into trouble. Then Jan (the Lorenzen's daughter) came along and we had an ordinary, happy life.

Jan: 60 years.

EM: How many years did you drive and distribute soft drinks?

Ted: They were in business about 3-4 years then Pepsi and Cola, all the big ones got doing the big bottles and they had lots of money to expand and it got to where we were getting pushed out. And that had to happen. There were 2 partners, as long as things were going well it was a happy deal but they gave it up since it wasn't paying that much. (anymore)

MT: What did you do then?

Ted: I had to find something, In the meantime, Kenneth the oldest graduated from high school and went into the Navy. He was over there in the Korean situation. We realized what it is to have somebody over there.

Jan: Did you start doing paint contracting then?

Ted: Yes, then I had to find something. A friend of Edith's, a couple that we went to see, Walter was a painter. I said I needed a decent job that would pay a little bit. He said just take the initiation fee, they want painters, everyone was looking for construction workers, it was going big, so I want into painting, went to apprentice school for 3 years and then I went into my own little business. I thought well the boys, all 3 of us would work together, but it didn't work out that way cause the first job I gave them scraping and cleaning, all the dirty work. They went their own way and all did pretty well. Ken retired from teaching in Anderson. He liked that cause he went hunting and fishing. Gary was working on the old automobile downtown, repair shop. He did that for a long time, then hurt his back. Jan could run real fast. She could run faster than anyone. I found that out when we were going from depot to depot (on their 1996 European trip). (Comments on their trip.) That's why we made that trip in such good time.

EM: Tell us about the trip. MT: What is the Isle called again?

Ted: Isle of Fohr (pronounced Ferr)

MT: Where is it?

Jan: In the North sea below Denmark. If you went north of Germany and there is a chain of islands called the Frisian Islands that just sit there and it's one of the islands there. Was under Danish rule for centuries and you'd see a big influence of Denmark, even though its now under German rule but that didn't take place till in the 1800s when Germany went up and took over the islands.

MT: Are the inhabitants of German or Scandinavian heritage?

Ted/Jan: More Scandinavian. Actually Germany hasn't had the islands that long, they were under Danish rule. 1866 when Denmark lost the sovereignty.

it's amazing now it's a small scale Hawaiian island, a retreat, to them. That's where they go to vacation and holiday. I was shocked.

MT: Why did you decide to take the trip. Why did you go?

Ted: First of all there are not to many Lorenzen's in this area, 500? We go together at a family gathering up at Windsor. Hank Cornielsen (sp?) who works at Sebastopol Hardware, we met at his place. There they had some pictures of uncle Karl. This picture was taken when he was close to 100 years old and he was the town crier. He would ring a bell and holler out stuff. He was my mother's brother. My older brother and I, Karl died at 104. We thought he was our hero, he was one of the first submariners that Germany had.

Jan: Actually one other thing about why did you go on this trip? Dad and I have talked at least 20 years about doing this. It just happened this year he decided to sell all his animals, he had polled Herefords all these years and had to take care of them, be around. he sold them and out of the blue says do you think we should take that trip now? in a matter of 3 weeks we were gone. We had to get his passport we just took off and did it.

Ted: This is something that amazed me we were walking down the beach area, they have little shops around there, this little book store, Jan says Dad I'm going to go in and see what they have. I said OK.... Then I said hey Jan, Uncle Karl is right in this window.

Jan: The book was open to this page and there he was! Then we found his relatives.

Ted: This book is something like you're doing here.

EM: Oral histories.?

Ted: It goes back way back in the 1800s and these people. ..well we should tell them about the trip.

MT: You said you located some relatives back there?

Jan: His first cousin was the one that was alive, most everybody has passed on, but we did find Uncle Karl's son. That was amazing we found him by the telephone book and opened it up and there were all these Lorenzens and we ran into some people who knew his Lorenzen line and told us kind of the area where we might find him. We were at the Museum that day and I looked up and there was the street that was listed in the phone book. We followed the street down, knocked on the door. I don't know German so we used sign language they invited us in and it was his cousin.

MT: How nice, how many people live on the island?

Jan: About 5-6,000.

Ted: Can't be much more than that. In this phone book there were 26 Lorenzens. The first day we took a bus ride, we had 3 different areas. One to the extreme edge of the deal and more out in the farms and the other you're coming in closer to the populated areas. We went down to this, Erganum (sp?) where this lady slammed the door in your face.

Jan: It was Lorenzen, it was his home village, I knocked on the door, I said you speak English, She says nein and slams the door. I said gee you have friendly relatives.

Ted: Just when I was trying to form a sentence. The next day we took a couple we met coming from Hamburg.

Jan: We took 3 planes then we get on the train and go 4 hours then we take a ferry to the island. That was non stop around the clock travel. On the train, this old train, only two cars were going where we needed to go, we had to figure out where to go, where to get... but these two people from New York overhead me trying to figure out what to do. And they ended up being angels on our shoulder because they embraced us, located a little apartment for us to stay in, the whole thing was just perfect. They spoke German, helped us out to interpret. The next day they went with us to this little woman. Of course she was wonderful once you could speak to her and she wasn't the Lorenzen line of my dad but she..

Ted: (the helpful couple) He left the Island when he was 18 and went to New York we never got to find out what he really does.

Jan: And He'd lived in Petaluma. So many people. Well they say Paytaluma. It cracked me up. They'd say Well we hope to come out to Paytaluma. They would come to Petaluma make money and go back to the island and buy these amazing cottages, turn them into bed and breakfast which is now the resort area for tourists-German and Danish people. But so much of the money was made in Petaluma. This area is so remote, and its such a trip to get there.

Ted: To go a little further, this beautiful little lady. We knocked and no response, well she's looking through another window to see who these bums area then she comes. (our new friend) went around the back. They keep their gardens so perfect. He came and said hey you guys I got somebody wants to meet you. He was talking to these 2 ladies whose were hanging out their wash. and they were laughing and got a big kick out of it too, here we come, they had us come in and talk.

Ted: We went to Knudsen's. Knudsen owned the big supermarket, the only one on the whole island and he owned it. Jerry got in touch with him, so Jerry and his wife Joanne (the helpful couple) said...to their house. They had champagne bottles on ice, nice cookies, cheesecake. You know how the Germans can bake cookies. The men were over at another table and were talking and had a genealogists who'd been back to Utah (Salt Lake City) They had..you can go

back many generations. Finally they figured out he was the one. (Ted's cousin) Those people were so accommodating and so generous.

Jan: And some of their family was in Petaluma, Knudsen's who had Knudsen's livestock. Everybody's got family in Petaluma.

Ted: Petaluma has a predominant amount of people who have been over there or their parents came over here and have gone back and are connected with relatives over there. It's easy for them. I want to add one little thing about our angel. Jan went up and talked to Jerry and his wife, and she asked about a little train sitting there. About going to Lungebol (sp?) He said come along with us we're going to the same place where his brother John's apt. (where we stayed) by the time we go to the Isle it was dark. We couldn't believe.

Jan: We didn't have reservations we were told that at this time of year it was off season and there'd be no problem. But when we got to the end of the line and where you had to catch the ferry. There were 100s of people loading and we found out it was a holiday for the German people, the whole week, so they were there on vacation. And that's when I went "oh no" we're not going to find a place to stay. And they overhead us say that and they said come with us. They loaded our stuff and the next thing we knew we were in this little apartment. for a week that was centrally located just by them overhearing us. We were so lucky. We were so tired.

MT: How old is your dad?

Jan: 80 in April, he was 79 when we made the trip.

MT: How old are you?

Jan: 48. It was amazing that things fell into place. Then its 20 Hours non stop travel to get there.

MT: Did he remember a lot of the island or any of it.

Jan: He was like a kid at Disneyland. It was so wonderful to see.
Parts when we went out to his little village. and things he started remembering. But he was so excited to be there. It was wonderful, I'll never forget it just seeing him. I felt this burden of making sure he got there and orchestrating and I don't speak German.

Ted: To me, I was overcome, I was looking around there were only a very few stop signs. Another thing beside being gracious and friendly when we went into a bake shop to get a cup of coffee and couldn't have the name on the tip of our tongue which pastry or rolls. Those bakery shops smelled so good. People 80, 90, 100 years, 3 years old they have their own bicycle. Its not a toy its a bonafide little bicycle. They have pretty good sized families, they're not throwing money away. Another thing I saw no police, no security, no arms or pistol, it was remarkable. These people come whizzing by on a bicycle.

MT: You said something in German, do you still speak German?

Ted: Its amazing there was a time around Petaluma there were a lot of immigrants from Germany there, (speaking low German)
John and Caroline had a little schooling (in German?) I was surprised just listening and talking how with a little description here and there you got along well with Uncle Karl's cousin. The only reason we got out of there faster than normal was he was a chain smoker and Jan finally said I can't stand it.

Jan: Well we weren't communicating cause he speaks half English with some German here and there so it was difficult but its amazing what you do with your hands.

MT: Was it difficult for you to speak English when you came to the USA?

Ted: I don't remember much about that. When you got into your teens you pick up all these...

Jan: Did you have trouble learning English when you first got here?

Ted: I don't think we had too many problems, John and Caroline did well. (shows picture from trip) me, Jerry and his wife, Jan.

MT: Did your brothers and sisters stay in this area?

Jan: Petaluma and Windsor yes,

Ted: This is where the apt. was. MT: That's lovely isn't it.

Ted: My mother was 89 when she passed away. Some friends had a newspaper clipping on this (uncle Karl)

End of tape.